NF Post
Iraq
24/8/04

The Najaf drama: Is the US seeking to sanitize Iraq's political landscape?

Sarah Whalen

Nobody knows how the Najaf drama will be played out. But some sections of the US media and some "terrorism" experts in the US have already decided what fate Shiite cleric Moqtada Sadr should meet with.

"Why not just kill him?" Fox News asks.

Why not, indeed?

Killing Sadr? Easy enough for the greatest military power on earth, even with the slight hindrance of having to use the interim Iraqi government as a human shield if forces must enter the sacred shrine in Najaf.

US forces in Najaf possess total air control, powerful armed tanks, night vision goggles and laser sights, and scores of skilled snipers armed with piercingly accurate rifles. What does the Mahdi Army have? AK-47s, a few mortars, homemade bombs, prayer beads...political and religious opinions...and, most recently, 2,000 unarmed Sadr supporters. Killing them would inspire condemnation throughout the Muslim world. But according to Fox logic, they might just have to go if they are in the way.

Important things are at stake, not least of which is neoconservatism's survival.

Sadr, complained former US Army Maj. Gen. Bob Scales, has confronted "the Occupier" four times, and "each time he escapes death, his status goes up!" Sadr's growing reputation as an Iraqi leader unfettered and unbeholden to the United States means future Iraqi politics, including elections, "could get messy." Sadr's survival could "affect the democratization of Iraq" and cause "perceptions" that US-led "democratization is not on the right path," Scales preached.

Another Fox commentator, former US Air Force Gen. Thomas McInerney, claims Sadr is Iran's puppet, "paid" to lead "a perfect storm." Iran's "objective," McInerney avers, "is to sheer off the Shiite part of Iraq and make that a province of Iran and take that oil wealth they'll have. And then they would love to see Syria sheer off the Sunni part and then the Kurds could go their (own) way."

The only way to prevent this is, in McInerney's words, to "take him out."

Or, as commentator Brit Hume clarified, "Go in there and just kill this guy."

Another good reason to kill Sadr is the upcoming US presidential election. Sadr "very well may be the cause of an October surprise," Scales cautioned.

That Sadr and his Mahdi Army, which Brit Hume disparaged as "a rag-tag collection of boys" and Scales described as a "street gang," could affect the US presidential election is something the neocons may not have envisioned.

But the neocon delusion that the Second Gulf War was actually a repressed Iraqi national desire, and that Iraqis now truly govern themselves, continues unabated: "If (Sadr) dies," Fox "experts" insist, "he needs to die with an Iraqi bullet in him."

As if there was one truly Iraqi bullet to be found in all of Iraq.

McInerney complained US forces' failure to kill Sadr early on was "a mistake." The US restrained itself because "Iraqi officials didn't want to" kill Sadr. "What we have to do," McInerney explained, "is to get Prime Minister Allawi to agree we've got to take him out. And I think they realize (that) now." Thus did Iraq's defense minister announce if Sadr and company did not leave Najaf, "We will teach them a lesson they will never forget."

But the only "teachers" in sight are the US Army's 1st Cavalry Division and the 11th US Marine Expeditionary Unit, and the US armour, helicopters, and warplanes they now command. Sadr insisted upon freedom of speech, the press, and the rights of Arabs to express Arab opinions. As more and more Iraqis decided they agreed with Sadr, his Mahdi fighters took to the streets, stunning Washington and unnecessarily costing American lives and many millions of dollars.

Bremer eventually departed and Al-Hawza reopened. But then the US, pushing the Allawi government in front of it like a cripple uses a walker, shut down Baghdad's Al-Jazeera office. Within a day, Sadr was back in the news and his loyalists back in the streets, trumpeting Iraqis' rights to choose their own news.

And he has a point. Is Al-Jazeera especially dangerous? American "reality" TV and violent cartoons theoretically inspire mayhem and murder, and American news shows report the same news Al-Jazeera does. But nobody suggests shutting down US stations. In picking this second fight with Sadr and threatening to kill him, does the US seek to sanitize Iraq's political landscape so that if Iraqi elections do ever come, the US can rest assured that all possible candidates will be from a pool of candidates who will do exactly what the US says?

"Assassination, poison, perjury..." declared Thomas Jefferson to James Madison in 1789, "were legitimate principles in the Dark Ages...but ...held in just horror in the 18th century." A purported early Al-Qaeda training manual warns its version of Islam calls for "the dialogue of bullets, the ideals of assassination, bombing, and destruction, and the diplomacy of the cannon and machine-gun." Wonder which one the neocons are reading as they train their sights on Sadr.